

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
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P 140630Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9108

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GABORONE 2291

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PFOR, BC, US
SUBJECT: THREATS INDUCE BOTSWANA TO ARM

1. SUMMARY: THE CENTRAL ELEMENT IN U.S. POLICY TOWARD BOTSWANA, AS REFLECTED IN PARA AND RELATED DOCUMENTS, IS TO PROMOTE AND ENHANCE THE STABILITY OF MODERATE. DEMOCRATIC, NON-RACIAL REGIME OF PRESIDENT SERETSE KHAMA. IN MODERN TIMES, UNDER THE BEST OF CONDITIONS, A HISTORY OF TEN UNINTERRUPTED YEARS OF DEMOCRACY AND STABILITY IS A UNIQUE ACHIEVEMENT IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD. YET THE FIRST TEN YEARS OF THIS YOUNG, NEWLY-INDEPENDENT DEMOCRACY SITUATED IN THE HEART OF SOUTHERN AFRICA HAVE BEEN PEACEFUL AND THE GOVERNMENT STABLE WITHOUT (RPT WITHOUT) DEFENSE OR MILITARY FORCES WORTHY OF THE NAME. THIS MESSAGE HIGHLIGHTS RECENT EVENTS THAT THREATEN TO DISRUPT THIS STABILITY TO THE DETRIMENT OF U.S. INTERESTS; IT RECOMMENDS A COURSE OF ACTION THAT, HOWEVER ANACHRONISTIC IT MAY AT FIRST APPEAR, OFFERS THE BEST (PERHAPS THE ONLY) PROSPECT FOR ENABLING BOTSWANA TO HOLD TO ITS PRESENT POLICIES, TO PERMIT IT TO CONTINUE TO DEVOTE ITS RESOURCES AND ENERGIES EXCLUSIVELY TO DEVELOPMENT AND TO HELP TO STAVE OFF PRESSURE OF ARMS REQUESTS THAT WOULD ALMOST SURELY RESULT IN INFLUX OF ARMS (AND CORRESPONDING INFLUENCE) FROM COMMUNIST SOURCES. END SUMMARY.

2. IT IS NOT SECRET THAT PRESIDENT KHAMA'S FORMULA FOR KEEPING INTACT BOTSWANA'S PRINCIPLES AND SOVEREIGNTY OVER ITS FIRST TEN YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE, DESPITE NEIGHBORS WITH SHARPLY CONTRASTING RACIAL AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES, HAS BEEN (A) TO PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE OF DEMOCRATIC NON-RACIAL GOVERNMENT AND (B) TO BALANCE OFF DEMANDS OF MILITANT BLACK AFRICAN NATIONALISTS FOR EXTENSION OF THOSE

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PRINCIPLES TO SAG BY ACKNOWLEDGING IMPERATIVES OF ECONOMIC

COEXISTENCE WITH SOUTH AFRICA. AT BEST IT HAS BEEN A PRECARIOUS
BALANCING ACT.

3. WE HAVE LATELY BEEN RECEIVING STRONG INDICATIONS, HOWEVER,
THAT PRESIDENT KHAMA'S ROOM FOR MANEUVER AND COMPROMISE IS
BEING SHARPLY LIMITED. SPECIFICALLY, GOB IS INCREASINGLY FORCED
TO CHOOSE BETWEEN ACTIVITST PRO-MAJORITY RULE, ANTI-APARTHEID POLICY
(AIMED AT RHODESIA AND SAG) AND POLICY OF COEXISTENCE AND STATUS
QUO. IN SHORT, DIRECT EFFECT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ON BOTSWANA'S
EASTERN FRONTIER IS THAT GOB FEELS IT HAS TO ALIGN ITS POLICIES WITH
THOSE OF MILITANT FRONTLINE STATES RATHER THAN HOLD TO IS PREVIOUS
LINE OF COMPROMISE, COEXISTENCE AND MODERATION.

4. A BAROMETER OF NEW GOB ATTITUDES IN DEFENSE MATTERS IS
IN REQUESTS FOR ARMS. UNTIL NOW, BOTSWANA HAS (AS NOTED)
ALMOST UNIQUE RECORD OF UPHOLDING NATIONAL INTEGRITY AND STABILITY
WITHOUT DEFENSE FORCES. BY KEEPING ITS DEFENSE BUDEGET AT ZERO
BASE (THERE IS NO RPT NO DEFENSE MINISTRY), IT REMAINS ONE OF
THE RARE COUNTRIES IN THE ENVIABLE POSITION OF BEING ABLE TO
DEVOTE THE NATION'S ENERGIES AND RESOURCES (INTERNAL AND THOSE OF
SOME DOZEN OUTSIDE SOURCES) TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT -- AND
HENCE TO LONG-RANGE STABILITY.

5. THE PURPOSE OF THIS MESSAGE IS TO CALL ATTENTION TO WHAT
APPEARS TO BE A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN GOB POLICY. IT COMES AS
RESULT OF RECENT RAIDS AND WHAT ARE PERCEIVED AS INCREASINGLY
SERIOUS THREATS OF ATTACH FROM RHODESIA. THESE ARE REALITIES
WHICH APPEAR TO BE PUSING GOB TOWARD ACQUIRING AND BUILDING UP
A SERIOUS GOB NATIONAL DEFENSE CAPABILITY.

6. THE EARLIER (STILL UNFILLED) GOB REQUEST FOR 400 AR-18 RIFLES
(STATE 294122 AND PREVIOUS) NOW APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN ONLY FIRST
STEP IN THE NEW POLICY, ALTHOUGH ONE WE CONSIDER JUSTIFIED AS TOKEN
GESTURE OF ARMING EXISTING RPT EXISTING POLICE FORCES AND POSSIBLY
A WAY OF FORESTALLING REQUESTS TO ARM A MODERN DEFENSE ESTABLISH-
MENT. GROWING GOB CONCERN IS EVIDENT FROM PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS
AND PRIVATE COMMENTS OF WELL-PLACED OFFICIALS INCLUDING PRESIDENT
KHAMA. EXAMPLE: AT OPENING PARLIAMENT NOV. 29 KHAMA
REFERRED TO THREATS TO BOTSWANA'S SOVEREIGNTY ARISING FROM
"POLITICAL UNREST AND INTERNAL STRIFE" IN SURROUNDING COUNTRIES AND
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TO "REPEATED INCURSIONS (INTO BOTSWANA) BY RHODEISAN FORCES".
HE ANNOUNCED THAT "AS A MATTER OF URGENCY, CONSIDERATION IS NOW
BEING GIVEN TO SUBSTATIALLY INCREASING... THE STRENGTH OF THE
PARAMILITARY POLICE MOBILE UNIT AND EQUIPPING IT WITH MORE
EFFECTIVE WEAPONRY". EXAMPLE: ON DEC. 10, A RANKING OFFICIAL
CLOSE TO PRESIDENT, IN A RATHER DISCOURAGED MOOD, EXPRESSED TO
EMBOFF HIS PERSONAL WORRY THAT A "RAID BY RHODESIAN FORCES ON
FRANCISTOWN REFUGEE CAMP (OF RHODESIAN BLACKS) MAY BE ONLY A

MATTER OF TIME". HE SAID THERE WERE DAYS WHEN GOB WAS "TOTALLY" PREOCCUPIED WITH BORDER VIOLATIONS AND INCREASING FLOW OF REFUGEES, ESPECIALLY FROM RHODESAIA, AND REITERATED GOB OBJECTIVE OF HANDLING REFUGEES DISCREETLY AND WITHOUT PROVOKING RHODESIA.

7. IN SUMMARY, GOB ATTITUDE IS ONE OF GRADUAL, GRUDGING RESIGNATION TO NECESSITY (IF FACE OF WHAT IS PERCEIVED AS PERSISTENT RHODESIAN THREAT) OF ACQUIRING ARMS TO ADD SUBSTANCE TO ITS HERETOFORE LIMITED ARSENAL OF POLITICAL/DIPLOMATIC MANEUVERING TO MAINTAIN INIOLABILITY OF ITS FRONTIERS. GOB PERCEPTIONS, E.G. AS REFLECTED IN PRESIDENT'S SPEECH TO PARLIAMENT, MAY MEAN IT IS ALREADY TOO LATE TO HOLD OFF GOB PURSUIT OF ARMAMENT OPTION. INDEED POLITICAL OPPOSITION IS INCREASINGLY TAKING UP THE CRY FOR ARMS, WITH SOME ELEMENTS OF PARLIAMENT AND IN UNIVERSITY (NOT ALL OF THEM IRRESPONSIBLE) URGING ACCEPTANCE OF CUBAN ARMS (LUSAKA 3279).

8. IT WOULD APPEAR AXIOMATIC, FROM REVIEW OF RECENT HISTORY AND STATE OF U.S. PUBLIC OPINION, THAT U.S. WOULD NOT BE THE WINNER (IF INDDDED IT WOULD SEEK TO BE A COMPETITOR) IN ANY RACE TO MEET GOB ARMS REQUESTS. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE MANY SOUND REASONS (MILITARY AND POLITICAL AS WELL AS ECONOMIC) FOR DISCOURAGING GOB FROM EVEN STARTING DOWN THIS PATH. WE ARE THEREFORE INCLINED TO ASK WHETHER ANYTHING WHATEVER CAN YET BE DONE TO MODIFY GOB PERCEPTIONS ABOUT SECURITY THREATS.

9. THE CLEAR CONSENSUS OF ALL ELEMENTS OF THE EMBASSY IS THAT WE HAVE LITTLE TO LOSE AND MUCH TO GAIN FROM TRYING TO LIMIT A GOB ARMS BUILDUP THAT WE CANNOT EXPECT TO CONTROL. WE REALIZE ANY PROPOSAL FOR AMS LIMITATION, GIVEN THE CURRENT MOOD IN MANY QUARTERS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA, WILL SEEM ANACHRONISTIC. BUT WE BELIVE IT IS WORTH PROPOSING.

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10. THE KEY APPEAR TO BE RHODESIA. AND TO REACH THE SMITH REGIME, THE CHANNEL THAT COMES FIRST TO MIND IS SOUTH AFRICA (WHICH WE BELIEVE SHOULD BE NO LESS INTERESTED). OUR SUGGESTION

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9109

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 GABORONE 2291

WOULD BE FOR U.S. TO ASK SAG SIMPLY TO MAKE THREE POINTS TO RHODESIAN AUTHORITIES: FIRST, TO NOTE THAT GOB HAS MADE, AND CONTINUES TO MAKE, A SINCERE MAXIMUM FEASIBLE EFFORT TO CONTROL REFUGEES ON IT TERRITORY AND TO FORBID USE OF BOTSWANA AS A "LAUNCHING PLATFORM" FOR GUERRILLA ATTACKS ON RHODESIA; SECOND, THAT VIOLATIONS OF BOTSWANAAN TERRITORY FROM RHODESIA ARE THE PRINCIPAL, IF NOT SOLE REASON FOR CURRENT GOB CALL FOR ARMS BUILDUP, IN WHICH NEITHER THE U.S. NOR ANY OTHER WESTERN COUNTRY IS LIKELY TO END UP AS PRINCIPAL SUPPLIER; THE THIRD, THAT RAIDS AND OTHER BORDER VIOLATIONS FROM RHODESIA WILL LIKELY RESULT IN INFLUX OF COMMUNIST INFLUENCE AND ARMS -- THE VERY RESULT THAT RHODESIA, SAG (AND ENTIRE NON-COMMUNIST WORLD) ARE TRYING TO PREVENT.

11. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION: GIVEN SUSPICIONS GENERATED THUS FAR, IT MAY WELL ALREADY BE TOO LATE (AS NOTED ABOVE) TO CHANGE THE COURSE OF GOB POLICY. PERHAPS THE OPTIMUM OUTCOME WE COULD HOPE FOR IS FOR THE DEPARTMENT TO REQUEST EMBASSY PRETORIA TO APPROACH SAG ALONG THE LINES SET FORTH IN PARA 10 ABOVE AND ASK THEM TO CONVEY THE POINTS TO RHODESIANS. WHATEVER THE RESULT, WE WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY PRETORIA ESTIMATE (PERHAPS INCLUDING SAG VIEWS) OF RHODESIAN INTENTIONS RE BOTSWANA IN ORDER TO ASSIST US IN ANALYZING GOB NEEDS AND ANTICIPATED REQUESTS. DEPENDING UPON OUTCOME OF ABOVE PROPOSAL, WE WILL PROCEED TO FOCUS ON (A) GOB PLANS FOR MILITARY BUILDUP (GABORONE 2207) AND (B) PROPOSED U.S. ROLE IN SUCH A BUILDUP CONSISTENT WITH OUR POLICY OBJECTIVES OF ENHANCING STABILITY OF THIS MODERATE, DEMOCRATIC, NON-RACIAL REGIME.

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12. REQUEST DEPT REPEAT TO PRETORIA, LUSAKA, MAPUTO AND LONDON AND ANY OTHER POSTS AS APPROPRIATE.
NORLAND

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